





Hollywood General Studios

The Economics of Film Criticism: A Debate Jean-Luc Godard and Pauline Kael

Jean-Luc Godard: All right, you want me to begin?

Pauline Kael: Please.

J-LG: Do you know how long this is supposed to go on?

PK: As long as they are interested.

J-LG: I was told it was going to be about an hour or an hour and a half, and I thought that's not very long; I thought it was going to be two or three or four hours. . . . When I was thinking about this event I tried to train myself by reading some of your articles on recent movies, so at least we would have something in common with the audience. I read something about *Melvin and Howard*, *Raging Bull* and *Heaven's Gate*, and I wanted to talk to you about them and also about an article you wrote six or seven months ago, called "Why The Movie Was So Bad."* Maybe we can begin with that.

PK: Fair enough. I think there was perhaps a negative implication when you said you had prepared yourself by *trying* to read some of my articles (*laughter*). To us that means you couldn't stomach it, but I hope that is not the case.

J-LG: No, no, because I don't speak well English or American (*laughter*) and I am really trying to listen to you and to myself speaking in a foreign language and today, after thirty years in the movies, I am more in-

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* The title of the article is, in fact, "Why Are Movies So Bad? or, The Numbers," *The New Yorker*, vol. 56, no. 18 (June 23, 1980), pp. 82-93—Eds.

volved in making pictures, so it is very hard for me to listen and to talk in a foreign language.

PK: I've heard you talk well enough in English to have confidence. I wish you would give me some sort of foothold here by telling me how you reacted to what I've written in these past few months.

J-LG: Well, just five minutes ago you told me that I should not hold you responsible for all American film criticism, but I think you are, in a way, just as I feel responsible for the movies I see even if I have not made them.

PK: Oh, no, I won't accept that. I can't believe that you personally feel that you are responsible for the work of somebody whose work you hate.

J-LG: Well, let's take this article, for example. You wrote about why movies are so bad, and you attack (and I disagreed with you) a good fellow you mentioned by name who was Vice President of some conglomerate. You made him responsible for everything that is bad in the movies. I said to myself, "How can one man be responsible for. . . ?" I mean a movie is made by a hundred people at least. It's like war. Nixon is responsible, but the American people are responsible for electing Nixon.

PK: Well, let me explain what I mean about the people at the top having that much influence. If the people at the top of the movie company are not primarily interested in movies, but come either from agencies or law firms or the business community itself, if they are from the Harvard Business School, as many of them are, and they are put in to rationalize the business, and if they look strictly in terms of how much money they can get out of a project before it goes into production, that is to say of how much they can be sure of from television, from overseas television, from cable, from cassettes, they know they can get the most money from pictures that have stars or have a big bestseller property. Those pictures are the easiest to market, and so it is the marketing decisions that determine which pictures they will make. And often if a picture comes along that they did not have much confidence in and really couldn't sell in advance, they don't do anything for it so that a picture like *Melvin and Howard* or, say, *All Night Long* or *Atlantic City* doesn't get anything like the promotion of those movies that they are sure of. As a matter of fact, they are embarrassed to be connected with those movies because they assume those movies are going to fail

financially and so, inadvertently, they *make* those pictures fail.

J-LG: Yeah, but it's not a good reason. It's right, but it doesn't describe the reality of making a movie. They alone are not making the movies, the movies are made by the audience, the movies are made by the cinematographers, by the union people; they are all responsible. . . I mean why don't they sell American cars today?

PK: Jean-Luc, let's put it this way. . . .

J-LG: No, it's because who is obeying this order? I try never to obey it. That's why. . . .

PK: You don't work in a big studio system.

J-LG: I wish I could (*laughter*).

PK: But the reason you can't is the reason I am explaining. It's the same reason that an American Godard could not work in the big studio system.

J-LG: But it is not the reason not to give me a picture to make.

PK: I am trying to explain something about the way movies are made in the Hollywood structure. I was not talking about you regional or independent filmmakers. Actually, *you* work much more like the regional and independent filmmakers in this country. You've never made a film that had to be a mass success in order to get its money back (except I believe *Contempt*), and I think that was probably your last experience with something like the studio system.

J-LG: No, it was my first experience with an American producer, that's why (*laughter*). . . .

PK: But, I mean, won't you even agree. . . .

J-LG: I am trying to explain that the title of your article should have been "Why Are *Movies* So Bad?" You as a critic, and myself as well, are responsible. But especially in America, *you* are more responsible, I think, if a picture is bad. This is because the critics are so powerful here and they are not using their power; or, rather, they are using their power in the same direction that the businessmen of the movies are.

PK: I think that's true to some degree because essentially they are working for the same companies that make the movies and also, of course, they tend to be impressed by big name directors rather than to look at the quality of the individual film. But it is not true for all

American critics just as it is not true that all American directors who work for the studio system give in. Many of them fight it and hold on to what their vision of the picture is. But, getting back to trying to analyze why movies in general in the country are so bad and seem possibly to be getting worse with the whole advent of cable television and big sales to commercial television—in the last few years they have become worse because I think there is less chance for any unusual project to get financed now because of the conglomerate control of the studios.

J-LG: Yeah, but then you have to forget about making movies that way and to do it another way. If you can't do it in the States you do it elsewhere.

PK: You know it's not that simple. A lot of people have ideas that are large scale ideas.

J-LG: Where do they get those ideas from? (*laughter*)

PK: Well, you are associated now with Coppola who is an example of a man who really works best on a large scale, not necessarily as large a scale as that of *Apocalypse Now*, but he does have an epic kind of vision. He is not a small picture man, not really. I don't think *The Conversation* is his best work and I certainly don't think *Rain People* is his best work. I mean, he is dependent on the studios' system of financing and releasing. I wish that he had been able to keep his independence, but he hasn't been. Well, because you work in a different way you assume that everybody can. I mean that's the trouble with talking about artists. They feel their way is the only way.

J-LG: No, not at all, but it's the only way that you can still exist. This is the only way. I never made a picture, I never dreamt of making a picture, I have always made what is possible.

PK: But there are people who fight the system and win. Some good movies come out of Hollywood.

J-LG: That's true.

PK: Most people when they start on a project hope to be able to make that good movie. For one thing they don't want to have to go through what the regional and independent filmmakers do, which is making a film and then spending two years flogging it around the country to get their money back. It's a terribly self-destructive way often, because with the studio they had a distribution guarantee, at least the hope of distribution, but if they work alone it is too defeating for them to spend

all their time virtually distributing the film themselves.

J-LG: For example, let's take a picture everyone, I think, including me (but I'd like to defend it) considers a bad picture, *Heaven's Gate*. I don't know what you have said about the picture, but I read some articles by Vincent Canby and other people, and I think they said a lot of good things about the *Deer Hunter* which I think was not that good; just as *Heaven's Gate* is not that bad (*laughter*). Even if it's a failure, in my opinion, failure is much more interesting than success because it is like a sick body. You can look at it and examine it and then say what's going wrong or not. I think *Heaven's Gate* is a very good example. It has a lot of magnificent things that the director cannot follow through on—for very obvious reasons which we can analyze. But the reviewers never say that, and never try to help even someone who is very arrogant, as Cimino is, to make a better picture next time.

PK: Well, let me first say that I was not as enthusiastic about the *Deer Hunter* as most of my colleagues, nor was I as condemnatory of *Heaven's Gate*. I did point out that I thought the picture was a failure, but that it was made by an artist. He is a man with talent. On the other hand when you say a failure is more interesting than a success, when it is a \$40 million failure it also depends on who finds this failure interesting.

J-LG: I do because with the \$40 million, I could do forty pictures (*laughter/applause*).

PK: That's part of the reason for the hostility against Cimino.

J-LG: A \$1 million picture is a very expensive picture for me. I would be secure for the rest of my life (*laughter*).

PK: You've just shifted ground.

J-LG: No, but I am thinking that in that picture what was interesting was they got lost. Maybe I would like to talk to you about it because it concerns me as a moviemaker and I am interested in America, which I consider as my home for its mood and my link with Francis—he has a studio and he tries to make a home out of his studio, and I have a home and I would like to make a studio out of it. This is the only link I have with Francis. But I think all good American directors—Scorsese, De Palma, all the famous ones, they are as lost as I am; we are not turning out the pictures we could turn out. I could deliver a much better picture, Martin could, Francis could, but we are not. Michael Cimino, too, could deliver a much better picture but he is not able to. When I saw

Heaven's Gate two days ago I thought that he was trying to make a picture in America when a big picture—like Griffith—is no longer possible. It's like seeing an artist who is crippled but doesn't know it. It is very interesting; because Michael is inventing it as he goes along, he is only capable of turning out a few shorts within a three-hour movie, but those few shorts are much more interesting than a lot of shorts in other pictures because it makes you understand what making a movie is. He is trying to make an American movie and that is very interesting.

PK: I can't quite follow what you are saying, because you are saying that these people are not able to do the films that they are able to do.

J-LG: That's true.

PK: In that case it's a paradox and I guess we just accept it.

J-LG: No, directors today go too far, whether it is made in Europe or by an Italian or a Spaniard, the better he is, the more he exaggerates. Francis exaggerates, I mean, he was going to make a nice little comedy just for the studio; he was secure, there was no problem, it would recover the money from *Apocalypse* in the long run, and then, suddenly, a \$4 million picture turns into a \$25 million one. This is an indication that something is going on and we have to look at it because it is our future—at least mine as a moviemaker. De Palma, too, who is gifted, goes too far when he puts his talent into such a lousy script.

PK: I think DePalma works relatively inexpensively so I don't know what you mean exactly. Most of De Palma's films, except *The Fury*, which was still moderately priced by Hollywood standards, have been done very cheaply.

J-LG: Well, he exaggerates in that he doesn't care about the script, and for him it would be a very good thing to take more care with the script.

PK: Well, he wrote his own script for the film and I thought it was rather good.

J-LG: I think it is a mistake because he goes too far, especially in the last one, *Dressed To Kill*. I like De Palma because he really works with the image; he starts with the image, and that's good, but he shouldn't have such disdain for the story.

PK: So did Hitchcock.

J-LG: No, no, this is not true, at least in two or four or five of his best pictures.

PK: Well I would say most of his films of the last twenty years of his life have very mediocre scripts. Even in some of the earlier films, he wanted to get in certain episodes and the scriptwriter maneuvered the script to that point (the script having been left to the poor screenwriter). If you look at movies like *Saboteur*, or *Foreign Correspondent*, you can see the script is just maneuvering around these episodes. But this I think is distracting us. I still don't quite understand your point when you say American directors *exaggerate* or go too far. I don't know whether you mean economically, technologically, or what, since there is a world of difference between De Palma and Coppola.

J-LG: In every way—they are making pictures which are either too big for them or too small for them, and they don't have a normal relation to their creation. It's like someone who has very important things to say, but who speaks so fast that we can't hear him.

PK: But what is a normal relationship? I mean, how can any artist determine that? Most of them vary from one project to another—Coppola has worked big and he has worked small. Now by temperament he seems to be working on a larger scale. But how can you ask a man to deny and fight his own temperament? Maybe it's on the largest scale that his greatest work will be done.

J-LG: To me, when you spend \$40 million on a picture like *Heaven's Gate* or *Apocalypse Now*, it's not on a large scale, it's on a small scale. Because on *Apocalypse Now*, I mean \$40 million—an American embassy in Saigon spends a lot of money every morning (*laughter*). Very early on I became my own producer. And I discovered that, in making movies, movies are not made to make money, they are made to spend money (*laughter*).

PK: Well I think there is some truth to that, even from the studio point of view.

J-LG: And Francis is a great spender (*laughter*).

PK: But there is a kind of magnificence about that. Some of these people have made a tremendous amount of money for the studios. In the case of say, Spielberg, and Lucas and many of the others, they have brought in hundreds of millions of dollars to the studios. So if they get a lot of ideas and want to try them out, and the picture gets expensive, they do have moral justification. They also know that when they make a lot of money on a picture, that money is not going to be put back into moviemaking. The conglomerates are going to take that money and

buy another industry, or a company somewhere, a papermill or a shoe business. So I don't worry too much about Transamerica's loss on *Heaven's Gate* because Transamerica has made enormous profits on some other movies. If it were a case of the money, . . . if it were \$40 million that you and other filmmakers could have that was being wasted, it would be something else. But it's very hard to control a certain kind of director now. A man like Cimino is a visionary kind of director. In the case of *Heaven's Gate*, everybody in the studio was terribly scared during production. But there *was* no way to control him because you can't fire a director who has the movie in his head. It's not like the old days, when you could fire him and replace him with another contract director who would just pick up the script at a given point and start shooting. There was no way that picture could have been stopped. So they *had* to let Cimino keep going. I mean they tried to pull in the reins on him.

J-LG: They could have, but they didn't want to. They were very eager to spend that amount of money. They even probably earned a lot of money on interest, because they control the bank that loaned the money (*laughter/applause*).

PK: No, I think not in this case. And I think that executives are scared shitless when a picture runs over budget like that because chances are a few heads are going to roll afterward. Everybody knows how frightened the executives are when a picture starts steamrolling ahead like that. I remember over a year before the opening, everybody in Hollywood was talking with bated breath about what was going to happen on *Heaven's Gate* because the company had simply lost control of the director, and they had to go with him in hope that he would pull something out. But I think you're being a little unfair to the critics as well, in the case of what happened with *Heaven's Gate*. I did think Canby's review was rather brutal. On the other hand, the fact is the picture does not have one good scene, or one good character, and it goes on for several hours (*laughter*). I think it's very interesting visually, but there is *nothing* that can carry it with an audience. If the company had thought that the critics were wrong, they would have put in millions in advertising and they might have recouped on the picture. A lot of terrible movies get by if the companies believe in them. But they didn't believe in it, and that is why they listened to the press. I mean, you take a picture like *Blue Lagoon*, which is *infinitely* worse in every way than *Heaven's Gate*, but it does have something that they could sell, which is

that subteens and teens take it very romantically. And so they put in about \$15 million flogging this miserable movie, and selling it very shrewdly in terms of church groups and parents' groups, telling the parents that it's going to show their children wonderful, clean natural love. And damned if they didn't succeed so well, that a few months after I wrote a negative review (and just about everybody else did) I started to get letters from readers complaining that I had panned this beautiful experience which had meant so much to their family (*laughter*). The power of advertising is enormous, and I think they might have gotten by with *Heaven's Gate* had they pushed it, had they opened it, say, the way they do with dogs in 1100 theatres, so word of mouth doesn't have time to spread (*laughter*). They might have gotten something out the first week at least, and maybe the second week. But they were dismayed because they could see the justice of what the reviewers were saying, that there was nothing there.

J-LG: But don't you feel as a writer in a magazine that you are part of the chain of the advertising business, and thus of the movie industry? How can you write in a little column like that between two advertisements? (*laughter/applause*)

PK: There are no ads there. I lost the movie advertising for the *New Yorker* many years ago.

J-LG: Not movie ads, but ads anyway.

PK: Well if you will look at the ads in the *New Yorker* they are all consumer products. That is to say, the company lost all the chemical companies when it published Rachel Carson's muckraking work. Every time they publish muckraking they lose a particular industry. There are some others like the tobacco industry, they won't take their advertising. There are enough shops, enough people selling expensive goods to keep that magazine editorially free. That's why it's the best magazine in the world (*applause*). There are very few free ones.

J-LG: Even when I was writing in France, there was no advertising at all in the paper that I wrote in. You just said (when we were coming here in the car) that you had trouble because you were asked to cut two or three lines.

PK: But that's a space matter, it's not an advertising matter.

J-LG: Well, a space matter, what is it?

PK: There are make-up men. I'm writing for a weekly, for people who produce a very beautiful magazine. They didn't have 25 lines for me and so I had to trim, because of course the movie reviews and the other review columns are thrown in at the last minute, and the other things are set. If you do run long, you have to cut. So I was in a rush yesterday to trim the piece as I had to make the plane to get here. But I have *never, ever*, been asked to change an opinion, or to do anything to oblige advertisers. And that is a rare experience for me, and for many other writers.

J-LG: Well look at the way the industry works. Even if you are not like a *Time* critic (because *Time* is in the movie business too), you are still part of the industry. Making a newspaper is part of the industry, it's part of the culture.

PK: Jean-Luc, your films attract educated, wealthy people. I mean, workers do not go to your films; that doesn't mean we reject your films because of the people who are in the audience. The more Marxist your films got, the more upper middle-class your audience became (*laughter*). But we don't say that that affects the quality of what you're doing. I am absolutely free as a critic to say what I believe. How much more freedom can a critic ask?

J-LG: Well, I think I have no freedom at all, and I wouldn't think of it that way.

PK: Oh, I think that's bull (*laughter*). You're free. . . , I mean, the movies you make are as good as you can make them, aren't they?

J-LG: Yes, sure, I'm free to fight.

PK: Well, that's it.

J-LG: But I think if American movies are not so good today, it's because there should be a different way of writing about them. I don't know if it's possible—from what you say it's not. You are not free, for example, to write regularly about an unknown movie. You would be fired by your editor. You are not free—let me put it that way. When I checked on the last two years of articles that you wrote in the *New Yorker* (I don't want to attack you personally), you tried to be different from the other ones to a certain point. You told me about *Kagemusha*, for example, that you tried to review it after everyone else had reviewed it. But why not two years after, why not two years before? Why don't you speak of a movie before it is completed? You are a movie critic. A

movie critic is not just being a reviewer. You write about a Paramount picture when Paramount decided to open it. And so where is the freedom? (*applause*)

PK: Well, let's put it this way. I could write. . . .

J-LG: No, I don't want to attack you on that. I think it's because it isn't possible to write about an Italian picture the day Paramount or United Artists is opening *Heaven's Gate*, because then you would be talking about a picture that may never appear here.

PK: No, actually I can review any movie any time I want to. The editor would love it if I wrote about unknown movies or obscure movies because then there would be less correspondence attacking me (*laughter*), because nobody would have seen the picture. It is my choice to review what I review. I have a pretty solid idea of what movies people want to hear about, and, journalistically speaking, it is utter idiocy if you write about movies that the country cannot see. Eighty percent of the readership of the *New Yorker* is outside of New York City. I try to write about films that are at least in circulation or will be, so that there is a chance people will hear about them. When I write about something like *Used Cars*, I know that it's going to be gone in New York except for a tiny theater somewhere. But maybe people around the country will get a chance to see it or will even watch it on television. No, I think there is a lot more freedom. I think you want to see the system as being more oppressive than it is, which I think is perhaps one of the problems that the public has had with some of your recent work. You take such an all-out condemnatory point of view that there are no cracks where people can do anything.

J-LG: No, that's not my problem. My problem is very much related to the critics. I tried to open the picture (and with my next picture I will try again) in some other place, not in New York. All the exhibitors refused by saying "You must open it in New York and we will wait. What are they going to say in New York at *Time* or the *New Yorker* or places like that? If they say good things, we'll take it." For me, the real producer for my movies and for a lot of European movies is the same because here in America you don't very easily accept foreign products. And I'm not as good as Japanese car builders. . . . The real producer for me is not Barry Diller at Paramount, or someone else in another company, it's you, it's Vincent Canby, it's Andrew Sarris, it's people like that who make the. . . .

PK: I think our word is fairly benign, I think my colleagues are often overly generous with their praise rather than not, because readers think there is something the matter with you if you are always hard on movies or if you pan a lot. They think you're sick, or that the sickness is in you. But I don't think that you quite understand the problem. The reason people don't want to open a movie without New York reviews is simply that the people will not go to it in a community because they simply have not heard about it. They would rather stay at home watching television—it doesn't cost anything. When they go out to a movie, something has to lure them and if they haven't heard anything about a movie, if they haven't seen television commercials or heard reviews or seen reviews, they assume it's a nothing movie, it's a dog or they would have heard about it and they won't buy tickets. That's why a picture like *Smile* folded. *Smile*, *The Long Goodbye*—a lot of pictures have died because they opened without New York reviews. Some of those pictures I think could have done very well had they gotten the New York reviews. And you get wonderful New York reviews (*laughter*).

J-LG: Not always (*laughter*)—this is an exaggeration. Because, especially in America, which is a big country, a large territory, the order to go and see something is coming from one tiny point. But this is not even twenty percent of the hundred percent of the reasons why movies are so bad.

PK: Well, I don't think that's quite true. In Washington, D.C. the critic there on the *Post* has a considerable influence. In Los Angeles there are critics with a lot of influence. I mean they make *a lot* of difference in certain communities.

J-LG: Yeah, but no. I mean, a picture would never open in New York because some Wichita critics have said. . . .

PK: No, no, it wouldn't, that's true.

J-LG: Well, this is something that will make the picture bad.

PK: No, but a picture can get bad reviews in New York and still become a success in any community where there is a really active critic on a power paper. And that has saved a number of movies that the New York critics have mauled. But I think you are negative from too many different directions. I think you want to see power centered where there isn't all that much power. The real power in movies is in the advertising, is in the marketing people who not only determine which movies

get financed, but which movies they are going to sell. And they work this out well in advance of the picture being made. When they have a strategic campaign planned, people hear so much about the movie, they're going to go see a movie that the critics praise. I write about a lot of movies that hardly anybody goes to see, because there is no really big scale television commercial advertising behind those movies. It's a very complex system, but there are ways to fight it. I mean, there is hope within it, and I think you somehow *want* to see it as totally wrong (laughter).

Questions and Answers

Question: *Mr. Godard, could you comment on the role of film in political change?*

J-LG: I never believed in it. I don't think an image or a chain of images can change something directly. And I believe in it less and less because I think people are more interested in words than images. It could change, but I believe that people are afraid to see things—that they prefer to talk about things and see them after. . . . The image is like evidence in a courtroom. For me, making a movie is like bringing in evidence. If I bring in the wrong evidence, it can be discussed, but *words* have to be used to build new evidence. It's the same way a scientist works. I feel very close to scientists because we are both building approaches to things. That's why I'm not working in criticism anymore these days—practically—because *there* words always come first.

PK: I do think films can be political, but I don't think that Godard had the temperament to make films that were effectively political. If you look at someone like Pontecorvo, the *Battle of Algiers* is a politically effective film, whether you agree with his point of view or not. So in some ways is *Queimada!* (*Burn*). There are people who have the temperament, who are so convinced of what they're doing, that they do use films politically. But I think when Godard, because of the sophistication of his own questioning point of view, tried to make political films, they *were* all words, they were really lectures to the audience. And people rejected them because those films did not work on them emotionally the way, say, Eisenstein, or Pontecorvo, or some other directors do.

Q: *Are you saying that films like *Sauve qui peut* (la vie) [Every Man for Himself] do not make any political statements, particularly feminist ones?*

PK: Oh, the feminist statement in that I was ashamed of him for

(*laughter*). In a work of such despairing content, I was ashamed that he had the scene of these two women smiling at each other, as if to say, "Ah, but women may be no better" or "are better." I mean that's like Ashley Montagu or somebody telling you that women are better than men, or more intelligent than men. That was the one scene that really rankled because it was too much, too much of making a little political point. And practically every movie has got that scene now. I mean, the women's "sisterhood scene" is the new cliché (*laughter/applause*).

Q: *How much relative weight do you think American films give to narrative, image, rhythm, etc.? Specifically, what in your opinion is the role of the image as opposed to the story in American filmmaking?*

J-LG: I never understood clearly what you Americans mean by narrative or story. I was always accused of not having a story in my pictures and I always thought that if ever there was a picture with a story it was mine (*laughter*). A criticism I would make of American critics is that they talk too much about the characters and not about the movie itself. (. . .)

Q: *What do you think of Michael Snow's films?*

PK: (to Godard) Do you know his work? It's conceptual, minimalist work. . . (*laughter*). I don't mean that in a pejorative sense, some of it is quite extraordinary. I have been on foundation committees where I voted vigorously to give him support. I think his work has all sorts of potential interest and all sorts of interest aesthetically. But he's really working in an area that isn't the theatrical film. He is really working more like a painter but working in the film medium. And his work is comparable to some of the work of the minimalist painters. (. . .)

Q: (*on criticism and on the film Melvin and Howard*)

J-LG: To me, a good review, good criticism (whether it is in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Film Comment*) would be trying not to say "I don't feel" "I don't see it the way you saw it," but, rather, "Let's see it, let's bring in the evidence."

PK: I try to give the evidence of how I felt about a film. Why don't you do a piece on it?

J-LG: No, because we can't do it just by talking, we can't. We have to bring in the evidence. And maybe, to write. . . .

PK: I think you're seeing it as a different kind of movie from the movie

it is—which you would resent the most if somebody else. . . .

J-LG: What have we seen? We should look at it (*laughter*). A real critic would project it now.

PK: Not necessarily, that's a different kind of critic, okay?

J-LG: No, it's a necessity, it's not a question of different kinds of critics, it's not an approach. If the doctor says to you when you are sick, "Look, Ms. Kael, I don't *see* that you are sick, I don't *feel* it," well, you would never be cured (*laughter/applause*).

PK: Look, I mean criticism is not an exact medical science, or an exact science of any kind.

J-LG: It should be.

PK: You've written a great deal of very fine criticism without doing it that way.

J-LG: It should be, if not. . . .

PK: Oh, this is perversity again (*laughter/applause*).

J-LG: No, is it perversity to use image and sound to talk about image and sound? This is not perversity.

Q: *I'd like to get back to the question of political films that we were talking about before. You mentioned Queimada! and Battle of Algiers—they are both very mythological . . . they tell things . . .*

PK: *Battle of Algiers* is mythological?

Q: *Well, in a certain sense, yes, everything is resolved. . . . It's easier for you to relate to it whereas Every Man for Himself is a very political film that deals with temporal sequences where you are forced to deal with despair. The aesthetic despair is presented to you in such a way that you have to be in it. In your position as a critic it's much easier for you to relate to Battle of Algiers than. . . .*

PK: No, because I reject *Battle of Algiers*.

Q: *There's too much distance between you and the Swiss prostitute in Every Man for Himself so you really can't appreciate it (laughter). . . . Everyone seems to feel that the film was too negative when, in fact, the film was very uplifting.*

PK: I think for one thing the young man misunderstood what I was

saying. I was saying that I think that the *Battle of Algiers* is a politically effective film. That does not mean that I like it. I think it did move audiences politically, and that Godard's work moves them in much more subtle and interesting and questioning and skeptical ways. And that is why I felt he was not effective in his own terms. I mean when he was talking about the camera being his *gun*, his weapon. . . .

J-LG: I never said that (*laughter/applause*).

PK: You see, I don't feel he ever was a political filmmaker in that sense.

J-LG: You can't kill anyone with a camera. I was always fighting with militants or leftists about using the metaphor of a gun for a camera.

PK: But, I understood from a number of your films, particularly the ones that followed *Weekend*, like *Wind From The East*, and a great many of the films that were very didactic politically, that you were trying to use film as a political weapon. Am I wrong?

J-LG: Not in that sense. I was trying, but I'm glad I was wrong. It took me quite a lot of time to discover it and it was my way to do this leftist trip, too. I'm glad that I went deep enough to see that there was no gun, and that the real power was somewhere else. But I quite agree that I used leftist speeches and things like that. I think a good example is *La Chinoise*. It's a rather good picture, in the sense you say he's a "good man" or he's a "good human being." It was made in 1967 before the 1968 events in France, before the Weathermen here, before the Baader-Meinhof in Germany, or the Red Brigade in Italy. At the time, it was hated by the left, who said, "These people are ridiculous." And today, after seeing it fifteen years later, we discover that all those people, even Bobby Sands a few days ago, are childish, and it's because they are childish that they are important people.

PK: Well, I hope you'll recall that I gave that an extraordinary salute.

J-LG: Sure.

Q: (*to Godard about his current philosophy*)

J-LG: I have no philosophy, not today. To me, making a movie, it's like being a detective or a lawyer or a judge or a prosecutor bringing in evidence like in a court case, and trying to find out what it's about. (. . .) I remember about twenty years ago when I first came here with my first picture, I said, "It's a pity, especially in America, that movies and cinema are taught in schools." And now, after twenty years, it's

become such an industry that I'm really sorry that I gave them the idea (*laughter/applause*). But they are doing something different from what I had in mind because they are teaching with words, not with images, or they project a movie and then talk about it.

PK: Well, I mean, you know there are a lot of different teachers too.

J-LG: This is what we are doing here. We are not doing criticism, we are just happy to talk to each other.

PK: Criticism is a very lonely work.

J-LG: Well, it shouldn't be. Because if the French New Wave was powerful, it was because it was only four people or four kids who were talking to each other. Every time there is a new movement in cinema here, like Coppola and Spielberg, or in Italy with Rossellini and Fellini—it only lasted two or three years. . . . The people involved were not yet established directors. They were not afraid to talk to each other about what they were doing. Today, they are afraid. Even critics don't talk to each other about movies. For us, when we wrote, it was very different. I was writing at the same time as François or Claude and Jacques, and we looked at films, and we disagreed and we discussed it together. It would be as if here you and Andrew Sarris *before* writing talked to each other. . . .

PK: Well, that would make things tough on the moviemakers.

J-LG: The tougher it is, the better (*applause*).

PK: No, Jean-Luc, the way you were doing it when you were young is the way a lot of film critics still do it. On a lot of the underground papers they talk with their friends, and they do work that way. Once you're in a position on a large paper or magazine, if you did it that way, a picture might not stand a chance. Because if it were a group opinion, if it were a consensus judgment, that would be hell.

J-LG: In the long run, it would be better.

PK: Oh well, what can I say again? (*laughter*)

Q: (*on how Godard makes his money*)

J-LG: Well, I have a company I formed twenty years ago. There are two of us in the company (Sonimage), me and Anne-Marie Miéville. We tried to live together and we failed, so now we have two separate apartments. The apartments are three-room apartments or condo-

miniums you call them here. They are very small. Since we live separately, we have two cars which belong to the company. She has a small car, and I have a bigger one (*laughter*; *Godard pulls a calculator out of his pocket*). I think we spend about, let me think, I have to think in Swiss francs and French francs and then in dollars. We spend about, I have to calculate (*laughter*)—I'm multiplying, I should divide (*laughter*). Each of us spends around \$1500 a month. But the two of us own the company and we use the company's money as ours, so I am able, earning that amount of money a month, to come here at my own expense, to pay for the Concorde and to take a first class ticket on TWA (*laughter/applause*).

Q: (*to Kael on the difference between film reviews and film criticism*)

PK: I think reviewing and criticism are basically the same thing. Generally, if the critic isn't very good you call him a reviewer. Fifteen people can be in a room and look at a movie shot by shot and still interpret what they see with totally different values and with totally different judgments. Generally speaking, I think it's simply a difference of point of view there. Sometimes in our views, say on *Melvin and Howard* for example, it could be a cultural thing. I mean, we would probably disagree very sharply about a film that was specifically very French too. I don't think that analyzing a movie shot by shot is any more scientific than describing your emotions when you see it. There is no such thing as scientific criticism. Value judgments are not made on a scientific basis and there is no scientific criticism in any of the arts.

J-LG: I have a strong need in my work to be criticized and to know where I was wrong or right, but with evidence. I'm afraid to be the only judge of my own picture. I need to be criticized, but with good evidence. If I were to commit a crime I would need evidence from you proving whether or not I had a reason to commit the crime. I read the review you did of my last picture, but I don't care whether you like it or not, I want the evidence.

PK: Yes you do, come on (*laughter*).

J-LG: That's not true.

PK: Oh. . . .

J-LG: No, that's not true at all. I wish I were given more evidence from critics that would give me ideas for my next picture. I'm sorry, but from your review I couldn't get any ideas for my next picture *except* that

I don't agree with Pauline and this is no help to me (*applause*).

PK: No, but look, I went through the movie and I was very specific about what I liked and didn't like. That, for me, is evidence. I mean not in a scientific sense, but it's critical evidence. You obviously don't regard that as evidence because you don't agree. There is no reason why you should feel you need to learn from critics. (. . .)

Q: *Miss Kael, I'm sure you're aware that one of the major criticisms of your work is the growing concentration on violence and perversity, if you will. I, personally, would like to thank you for writing these reviews because they made films like those accessible to me. I would never have dreamt of going to a violent movie if I hadn't read your review first.*

PK: What kind of game are you playing, Miss? (*laughter*) Which films that I have recommended have you gone to and how exactly have you reacted?

Q: *Dressed To Kill, and I didn't watch half of it but I wouldn't have missed it. . . . Are there more violent films being made today or are you choosing to review only violent films?*

PK: Actually, most of the films of violence are big commercial films, and I give very little space if any to them. I single out the ones that I think really need the violence or use it for an effect. I happen to think that *Dressed To Kill* is one of the wittiest suspense comedies ever made. And its violence—I think that issue has been blown up considerably. I think most suspense comedies do have a certain amount of bloody thrill in them. I mean, movies were attacked from the beginning of movies for sex and violence, and that issue is still with us. But there are a lot of movies where I think the violence is offensive. For example, in a movie like Clint Eastwood's *Magnum Force*, where I thought the only thing that people were sitting there waiting for was the next violent episode because there was nothing but passivity and boredom in between. Well that kind of violence I point out where I think it serves a purpose, as in, say, *Taxi Driver*. I'm going to talk about that film as a violent work of art or as a violent work in certain terms where I think it's legitimate. But I by no means say all violence is swell. I'm the person in the theater who draws back from it often. But I try to distinguish because, well, at the moment, for example, there is an enormous campaign against movies based on the assassination attempt on the President. And instead of saying "Let's get rid of guns" the gun lobby is saying "Let's get rid of movies like *Taxi Driver*, let's crack down on the movie industry." Well

of course the reason *Taxi Driver* is so close to that assassination is because it was based on the story of Arthur Bremer. I mean, Paul Schrader *took* the profile of Arthur Bremer and it happens to fit a lot of assassins. And so naturally people are going to see the next assassin as in that profile. But I think you've got to make distinctions between different kinds of violence. Right now the women's movement in particular, has become rather holy as if there were no legitimate use for violence at all. And in that particular movie they have said that the Angie Dickens character was killed as punishment for adultery, which really shows no understanding of the movie at all. I mean, what's funny, is that this poor, harmless woman, who's charming and whom you like, I mean what's funny in a very Hitchcockian sense, is the first time out of the box she goes and has some fun, she gets it (*laughter*). And if you can't respond to it on that level, of its wit, then you're not seeing that movie, you're seeing the issue you went into the theater to see proved.

Q: (. . .) *There are a lot of men running around killing women, thinking it's a very sexy thing to do. I think this is a very unhealthy view of sex.*

PK: I'm always uneasy when that word health is invoked. I really think you're drawing very close connections there. I mean the movie is made in different terms than those in which some people are talking about it, and I think you have to see it in terms of a sex comedy, which is what it is.

(. . .)

J-LG: I would like to talk about Scorsese, for a moment, and his fight against Kodak, about the fading of the color. I mean everybody complains about it. Well, first you can use another stock than Kodak. You can use Fuji, and if you don't want film stock, you can use video tape. Scorsese could shoot his picture on videotape. Tapes are made to last for at least 200 years. Nobody's obliging Martin to shoot on bad film stock. So why does he keep complaining? You can change it. For example, I like Kodak, I even thought of putting an ad in *Variety* thanking Kodak for making bad stock because I'm sure the color of my picture will fade and so maybe some people will order a new print (*laughter*).

PK: Are you saying he should not put up a fight for decent color that will last?

J-LG: What do you call decent color?

PK: I mean the fact is that most Americans. . . . If you look at a 20th Century Fox, a wide-screen movie of the fifties, it has faded to a pale blue.

J-LG: So what?

PK: Well there are a lot of us who would like to see movies in the condition they were made in.

J-LG: Okay, so beginning today or tomorrow, change stock. Do it on videodisc.

PK: But you cannot get the same effect in video that you can get with a camera.

J-LG: Oh course you can, even much better.

PK: Well, I would doubt that a number of directors would agree with you. But the fact is he's putting up a fight to get good color stock on the market.

J-LG: They don't want to change, they just want to complain.

PK: Oh well (*laughter*).

(*inaudible comment from audience*)

J-LG: It's possible, and there is something which is deeper. Why do we want our picture to last longer than we do ourselves? (*laughter*)

PK: I mean the color fades within a year or two. You can't even get a strong black contrast now that you can't get Technicolor.

J-LG: You can.

PK: The last Technicolor film was really *Godfather II*.

J-LG: Why don't they go back to Technicolor?

PK: Because the technicolor processing is not done in this country anymore.

J-LG: Why don't they do it again?

PK: Well that is what he's trying to get.

J-LG: No, he is trying to get other people to do it, but not he, himself, to do it. So it's too easy. These people like to complain a lot. I just wanted to say that in my opinion, why should we think that our pictures. . . . I mean, at least, when a woman is making a baby, she doesn't think that the baby should last for more than she will last

herself. So why are we thinking our pictures should? When we see paintings today by Rembrandt, El Greco or Giotto, the color has nothing to do with what the color was at the time it was painted. Most of those pictures have been destroyed by time or other bad things which can happen to paintings. When they are restored, they are completely different.

PK: I think Scorsese has made the point very strongly that he wants to see the pictures of the past half century in the shape they were when they were made.

J-LG: Well if he wants to, he can. He just has to get together with other directors, or other cinematographers to rebuild Technicolor. Technicolor exists in China. If you don't want to do it here you can go to China.

PK: I think he's putting up a fight for that reason, to get it restored. But I do think you have to make a stink. An awful lot of people don't realize how color has faded. He has made people aware of that. People that go see something like that old war horse *Gone With the Wind*, have no idea that it's *nothing* like what the picture looked like.

J-LG: Yeah, but he's fighting in the wrong direction because he can order new positives—the negatives are quite good. You can see all my pictures, but you just have to order a new print. That's all you have to do. For the next hundred years you can see all my movies in very good color. You just have to order a new print. If you don't have the power to do it, who *does* have the power? This is the real question. It's easy to attack the Vice President of Transamerica, it's too easy.



Contempt (1963)